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SOVIET UNION - EASTERN EUROPE

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A Soviet Diplomat Views  
the Middle East

A senior Soviet diplomat concerned with Middle Eastern affairs has recently made a very bearish assessment of Moscow's prospects in the Middle East.

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[redacted] Moscow recognizes it will be unable to regain a prominent role in Middle East diplomacy until US peace initiatives run their course. The diplomat said that the Soviet leadership was concerned over Moscow's inability to play a decisive role in the region, and thinks it better to play "no role at all" at this time. He said this decision was reflected in the postponement of Brezhnev's trip to the area.

The Soviet expressed the view that US peace efforts will inevitably founder on Israeli intransigence and on internal pressures in Egypt and Syria for faster progress toward peace than is realistically attainable. In the meantime, he said Moscow will only pay lip service to an immediate convocation of the Geneva conference; Arab dissension, as well as the continuing lure of the US step-by-step approach, had led Moscow to conclude that it had little to gain from the conference now.

The official's remarks appear to be a candid and realistic assessment of the Soviets' short-term prospects in the Middle East. Developments since the October war have convinced most Arabs that only the US can deal effectively with both sides and Moscow has remained cut-off from the significant negotiations.

This does not mean that the Soviets will forgo maneuvering to regain influence in the area. Moscow will certainly continue to cultivate its Arab friends while indicating to other leaders, such as Sadat, that they must make concessions if they are to receive aid.

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Albanian Nationalists  
Sentenced in Yugoslavia

Belgrade announced yesterday afternoon that five members of the Albanian minority have been sentenced to prison for anti-state activity. They were found guilty of "destroying constitutional order" and "inciting national intolerance" in the province of Kossovo--the center of Yugoslavia's ethnic Albanian minority.

Those sentenced were evidently the ringleaders of a nationalist demonstration in the Kossovo last month. A Reuters report from Belgrade on January 13 said that over 100 Albanians were detained after the incident. According to Reuters, government sources confirmed that a demonstration had occurred and that a few individuals were still in custody.

The protest reportedly began at the provincial university in Pristina, where students were the most active demonstrators against Belgrade's handling of the Albanian minority. The students reportedly went so far as to call for a union of all Albanians in Yugoslavia with their fellow nationals in Albania.

Ethnic Albanians in Yugoslavia are one of the country's poorest, least-educated, but fastest growing minorities. Belgrade has tried by levying special taxes on the wealthier regions to promote economic growth in the Kossovo, but the program has been unsuccessful. Despite legal equality for the Albanians, de facto discrimination, particularly by the Serbs, continues.

Albanian nationalism last surfaced in 1971, when Serb and Albanian students engaged in fist-fights at Pristina University. As a result, the

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Kosovo leadership got orders to clean house. Tito did not abandon his support of provincial party boss Bakhali at that time, but Bakhali may now have to pay for the new embarrassment.

In addition to its internal difficulties, Belgrade faces the problem of how to quiet the reported Albanian restiveness without endangering its gradually improving relations with Tirana. Yugoslav authorities may also be wondering whether there is any linkage between the Albanian minority's reported anti-regime activity and the recent Cominformist plot.

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East German Premier Spends  
Five Days in Romania

During East German Premier Sindermann's recent five-day visit to Romania, ten bilateral conventions, agreements, and documents were signed in an obvious effort to put the best possible face on Romanian - East German relations. A protocol on the joint expansion of economic and scientific-technical cooperation and on trade exchanges headed the list.

In private, the two sides undoubtedly touched upon preparations for a conference of European Communist parties that is slated to be held in East Berlin later this year. They carefully avoided the subject in public, however, because of their sharply differing views of Soviet efforts to coordinate international Communism at multi-party conferences.

Sindermann talked with Premier Manescu, and a number of other Romanian luminaries, including Ceausescu. The communique, issued the day after Sindermann's departure, suggested some give and take. Among other things it:

- Expressed satisfaction with the development of bilateral relations.
- Reported that the two sides "tackled some current international questions" (a formulation implying there were disagreements).
- Emphasized the need to transform Europe into a region of "genuinely equal collaboration in which the security of all peoples is guaranteed."

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--Called for a quick and successful conclusion to the European security talks.

--Noted the important contribution made to the cause of international peace by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

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Yugoslavia: Taking Aim on Inflation

The Yugoslav Federal Assembly wound up its 1974 sessions by adopting measures designed to give teeth to the government's priority goal of checking inflation. Expenditures for social welfare are to grow more slowly than in past years, with the resultant savings channeled into investments in energy, raw materials, and agriculture. Increases in personal income are to be restricted to between 2.5 percent and 3 percent in 1975 compared with a 3 percent increase last year. Additional measures to limit domestic trade and the money supply are on the drawing board.

Disputes between the federal government and the republics have increased as a result of these programs. Most of the republics, fearful of a loss of constitutional prerogatives, oppose the limits put on personal income growth and on government expenditures. Slovenia protested so vociferously that a compromise was arranged that largely exempts it from the restriction on expenditures.

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Bulgarian-Greek Relations: No Problems

Last week's visit to Bulgaria by Greek Foreign Minister Bitsios enabled Sofia to expound further on one of its pet foreign policy themes--Balkan cooperation--and to laud the development of relations with Athens. Party leader Zhivkov and Politburo member Todorov talked with the Greek visitor, and the Bulgarian press gave extensive coverage to Bitsios' activities.

The communique summarizing the talks broke no new substantive ground, and both sides chose to accentuate the positive by tacitly ignoring political problems, such as their historic differences over Macedonia. The two sides signed a number of economic cooperation agreements and agreed to start negotiations soon on a long-term trade protocol.

On international matters, the parties predictably declared their support for a "just and political settlement of the Cyprus problem" and affirmed that the Middle East problem should be resolved according to UN Security Council resolutions. In addition, they noted that the third and conclusive stage of the European security talks should be convened "as soon as possible at the highest level."

Sofia has been actively courting Athens since the Karamanlis government came to power and Greece weakened its military ties with NATO. The Bitsios visit capped these efforts. By continually stressing the satisfactory state of bilateral contacts and emphasizing the potential of further opportunities in new areas, Sofia seems eager to nudge the new Greek government into an even closer relationship.

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Almeyda: Something for Bucharest  
to Crow About

The Romanians are trying to reap a propaganda windfall from the arrival in Bucharest on January 12 of ex-Chilean foreign minister Almeyda and four other members of the former Allende government. The Romanian press is already trumpeting Almeyda's "liberation," which, it asserts, came as a result of President Ceausescu's personal intervention with the Chilean junta.

Almeyda is by far the most prestigious of the more than 1,500 Chilean refugees currently in Romania. Whether his "liberation" was, in fact, the result of Ceausescu's intervention, Bucharest will undoubtedly tout the incident as proof that Romania --the only East European country to retain full diplomatic ties with Santiago after Allende's ouster-- had made the correct political decision.

Almeyda's presence in Romania should also raise Bucharest's image a notch or two in the eyes of the nonaligned nations--with whom Romania is increasingly trying to identify. This advantage could wither, however, should Almeyda decide to choose to live in exile elsewhere. Many of Almeyda's compatriots who are in Romania have had difficulty adjusting, and some have reportedly sought to leave Bucharest for exile in other European capitals.

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